Smoking remains the principle cause of preventable illness and premature death, sadly it is self-inflicted. In England, current hospital admissions are 474,000, treatment costs £2.5 billion, deaths 79,000 – frightening figures. Many die an awful death from smoking related illnesses caused by the carcinogens, tars and carbon monoxide present in the smoke released during the combustion of tobacco.

Whilst the nicotine causes dependency, it is the smoke that kills. This fact lead the Chinese pharmacist, Hon Lik to develop today’s electronic cigarette patented in Beijing in 2003. Unfortunately this came too late to save his father who soon after wards died from a smoking related illness.

I am an 85 years old retired R & D scientist who smoked strong, unfiltered cigarettes for 69 years before making this change some 5 years ago. At that time I was diagnosed with Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), the same disease which caused the death of my only son at the age of only 47.

On being given a Lung Function Test it showed a breathing rate of only 50% of normal. On searching the internet, I could find no evidence of the possible effects of vaping on my lungs, so I became a guinea pig by arranging with my GP to have annual lung function tests in order to find out.

The results improved to 80% after 18 months, 82% at 3 years, 88% at 4 years, and 88% at year 5, showing it had stabilised, resulting in my health and quality of life improving dramatically; whilst still satisfying my nicotine dependency. Chest infections have been reduced. This demonstrates the body’s remarkable recuperative properties in only 4 years, despite abuse over 69 years! It will never reach 100% because of the irrevocable damage caused to my alveoli by smoking.

Although these improvements are entirely due to stopping using tobacco, I find it significant that:

(a) the use of e-cigarettes does not appear to have had a detrimental effect on these lung improvements, whilst satisfying my nicotine dependency.

(b) it is never too late to stop smoking.

For many the electronic cigarette has proved to be the most effective nicotine delivery system ever developed, allowing hardened smokers to change from smoking tobacco, to vaping nicotine, both quickly and effectively. As a smoker I find it easy to see why. It addresses 6 of the 7 elements which give gratification to smokers, and one does not feel they have irrevocably stopped smoking but merely changed one cigarette for a much safer type.

Over the past four years, as my health improved, I became an active advocate for vaping. Recently I was invited to attend a three day Global Forum on Nicotine in Warsaw, the theme of which was Harm Reduction – Saving Lives. The organisers agreed to my wish to meet Hon Lik, who was to give the opening address. I thanked him for improving the quality, and length of my remaining years and his closing remark was that he felt I would be the first vaper to reach the age of 100.

There can be no doubt that for those of us cannot, or choose not to live without our daily nicotine fix, and wish to enjoy the tactile, oral and psychological elements associated with smoking, electronic cigarettes are a much safer alternative, being orders of magnitude less dangerous to our health than inhaling the products of combustion arising from smoking tobacco.

The take up this of this relatively new device has been phenomenal, world – wide and possibly highest per capita, in this country at 3 million, due, partially, to the Governments laissez faire attitude towards vaping. In other countries smokers are denied the benefits of using this harm reduction technique, due to harsh regulation e.g. (USA) and outright ban as in Australia. ONS latest figures show the lowest ever recorded for smoking in the UK at 15.6%!

The UK Government is the first in the world to formally recognise the importance of this ground breaking harm reduction technique. As part of its aim for a Smoke Free Generation by 2020, the Department of Health recently issued its Five Year Tobacco Control Plan which, inter alia, hints at the future prescription of electronic cigarettes, something I forecast 2 years ago. NICE are currently consulting on how the medical profession can best introduce this new device into their Nicotine Replacement Therapy armoury.

Electronic cigarettes are improving the quality, and length of life of millions of people both in the UK and world- wide. Hon Lik’s innovative device now affords us, for the first time, the opportunity to break the scourge of tobacco and realise a smoke free future for all.